

Socratic Seminar Questions

What happened to Hester Prynne's husband that she was left alone in Boston without family? (after the first 4 chapters of The Scarlet Letter).

Does either Hawthorne or Hester approve of her adultery? How can you tell?

Why doesn't Hester just leave New England?

Why is Hester the heroine of this novel?

In what ways does she far eclipse any of the male characters?

How (in what specific ways) might the same story have differed if a woman had written the novel?

Pearl

- What sort of child is Pearl?
- What are the images attached to her in the story?
- Does she seem real?
- Why is she the way she is?
- Why is her mother so worried about her?
- Does Pearl ever change? Is there any significance to that?

Is the story tied to a specific time or place? If yes, in what ways is it specific to Puritan New England and why isn't it relevant to our own time and place? If no, in what ways is the story universal and not tied to any one time or place?

As you read the novel, did you think Mistress Hibbins was a witch? How does it matter in the story?

What is Dimmesdale's reason for keeping silent for seven years? How valid is his reasoning?

To what extent has each of the major characters (Hester, Arthur, Roger, Pearl) sinned against the others? To what extent is each culpable?

Symbolism and Imagery

- How do these major images in the story (the rose and the prison, the scaffold, the letter A in its varied colors and appearances, the brook and the forest, the weeds growing in the graveyard, night and darkness, the double meaning of leech) tie together the novel's plot and the themes?
- To what extent do the characters' names appear to be symbolic?
- What colors does Hawthorne use repeatedly? How do these repetitions function in the novel?

Was this a relatively easy novel to read? Why? Why not?